



SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF HIJRAS-A CASE STUDY FROM TARAKESWAR LOCAL TRAIN

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ABSTRACT

Third gender – this is one of the most pertinent topics discussed today. The third gender includes a few different groups in South Asia; the most common are the Hijras. Hijras are often born male but look and dress in traditionally feminine ways. By 2014, India officially recognized third gender people with equal rights, “it is the right of every human being to choose their gender,” – initiated by Supreme Court. But the reality is different. They are deprived socially, economically as well as physically and are psychologically abused. Their livelihood especially during journey in local trains highlighting the problems faced by them is narrated here.

KEYWORDS: Hijras, Mainstream, Initiation, Social Identity, Harassment, Community

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings. We live in a society constituting of people of various faith, religion, language, cast and creeds. In this article I am focusing on a particular part of our society that is third gender or more specifically hijras. Because I believe any study of our society is incomplete until we have touched all its sections.

The term ‘Transgender’ refers to those who don’t identify themselves completely with either dichotomous gender – male/female. The American Psychological Association and World Professional Association for Transgender Health define them as ‘people whose gender identity (sense of them as man or woman) or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their birth sex.’

Hijras occupy a unique and contradictory place in Indian society. They are in special gender identity (third gender) in Indian Society. Hijras are considered neither man nor woman in biological point of view. They are psychological man who has adopted a feminine identity gender role and wear women’s clothing. The word ‘*hijra*’ means someone who is neither a man nor a woman.

LITERATURE STUDY

In the article named ‘The Hijras of India- A marginal community with Paradox Sexual Identity’ by Sibsankar Mal published in Indian Journal of Pschiatry (Jan-Mar 2018) cites that hijras are physically, verbally and sexually abused. The author cited different example of gharanas among them and the distinction among them.

A thesis submitted to Sikkim University, Department of Sociology titled ‘The Third Gender : A Sociological Exploration of Life of Hijras of North Bengal and Kolkata’ also cited different problem among the hijras and also bring out

the differentiation among life of hijras of Kolkata and North Bengal.

An autobiography of a hijra Lakshmi Narayan Tripathy (a well known celebrity and working for upliftment of community) written by Vaishalii Rode in Marathi and translated Prof. R. Raj Rao included 21 chapters in itself. In this book Laxmi spoke about every sphere of her life, her struggle and all the bitter truth of her life.

An article ‘Changing trends in Socio-Economic condition of the Transgenders’ by Gana Sanga Mitra S, Vijaylakshmi give historical evidence about hijras of India cited example that they have been an integral part of the Hindu mythology, folklore, epic and early Vedic and Puranic literature.

In his article ‘A study on economic health transgender community in India’ by Keshav Kundalikarao state that the hijras are subjected to social exclusion, discrimination in education, medical facility and job opportunities.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study are:

- To assess the socio-economic condition and psychological problems faced by them
- Problem of inclusion in mainstream society
- To find the difference between the law and reality

METHODOLOGY

In this article I have used both primary and secondary data. Mainly descriptive research method is used to gather information about a particular group. It is a qualitative research work so I have done convenient sampling for my case study method.

The Term Hijra

The term “*hijra*” originates in South Asia. It has translated into English as “eunuch” or “hermaphrodite,” ‘transversities’, ‘homosexuals’, ‘bisexuals’, ‘androgynes’, ‘transsexuals’, and ‘gynemimetes’ etc. In Telugu a hijra is referred to as ‘napunsaka’, Kojja’ or ‘maada’. In Tamil the equivalent term is ‘Thirunangai’, Ali’, ‘aravanni’. They are also known as ‘durani’ in Kolkata and ‘menaka’ in Cochin. In Punjabi both in Pakistan and in India the term ‘Khusra’ is used. In Gujarat they are called ‘pavaigua’. In Urdu another common term is ‘khuaja Sira’. In Bengal they are called as ‘hijra’, ‘hijla’, ‘hijre’ etc.

Past Scenerio

The term ‘hijra’ has its origins in South Asia, often depicted and mentioned in Indian mythological accounts. The Hindus nurse a belief that the hijras have the power to bless people and instill fertility. According to research, Hijra community in India has existed with a recorded history of more than 4000 years. ‘Sikhandi’ from the Mahabharata is known to one and all. Early puranic and vedic literature, folklore and Hindu mythology have the concept of ‘napungsaka’ which is the historical evidence of recognition of ‘third gender’ during that age.

Hijras who were then called ‘khwajja sabar’ were important constituent of the royal court during the Mughal Rule in medieval India. Hijras were considered to be very loyal, trustworthy and clever which enabled them to occupy important position in the royal court and society.

Small princely states of the Indian subcontinent also gave land, protection and other benefits to hijra through entry into the hijra community.

During the British colonial rule the hijras were stripped off all the civil rights enjoyed by them till then. They were criminalised through the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 which included all hijras.

Inclusion of Hijras

Dhananjay Mahapatra in his rept ‘Supreme court recognizes transgender as ‘third gender’ in The Times of India published on 15th April, 2014, stated that Supreme Court created the third gender status for Hijras. Hijras were legally granted voting rights as a third sex in 1994. On 24 April 2015, the Rajya Sabha unanimously passed the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 guaranteeing rights and entitlements, reservations in education and jobs (2% reservation in government jobs), legal aid, pensions, unemployment allowances and skill development for transgender people. It also contained provisions to prohibit discrimination in employment as well as prevent abuse, violence and exploitation of transgender people. The bill also provided for the establishment of welfare boards at the centre and state level as well as for transgender rights courts (.

On 22 April 2019, the Madras High Court, the high court of Tamil Nadu, ruled that the term “bride” under the *Hindu Marriage Act, 1955* includes trans- women. Specifically, it directed the authorities to register a marriage between a man and a transgender woman.

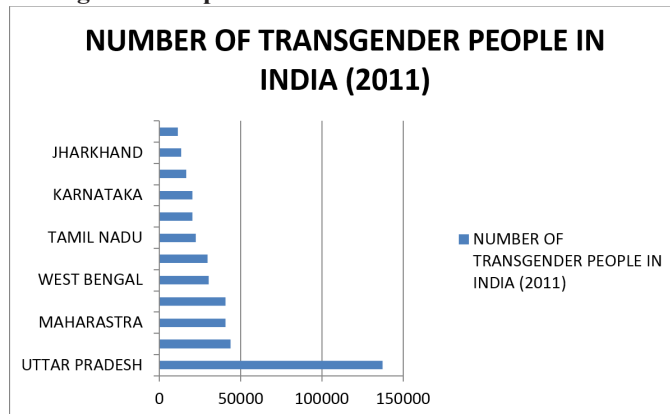
A government bill, the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019*, was reintroduced in the Parliament after the 2019 general election.

The court also ruled that the Indian Constitution mandates the recognition of a third gender on official documents, and that Article 15 bans discrimination based on gender identity. In light of the ruling, government documents, such as voter ID cards, passports and bank forms, have started providing a third gender option alongside male (M) and female (F), usually designated as “other” (O), “third gender” (TG) or “transgender” (T). (source: Internet)

Division Among Them

In India, an authentic hijra identity is based on its affiliation to a **hijra gharana (house society)**. The hijra gharanas are symbolic units of lineage, called a house, guiding the overall schematic outlining of the social organization of the hijra community in India. Hijras live in small groups. In each of these groups, there is a kinship hierarchy. Each group consists of a guru and her disciples (Hijras always refer to themselves as females); these gurus in turn answer to other gurus and ultimately, all Hijras come under the auspices of a handful of “top” leaders (gurus). The leader of the Gharana (Mahalla) is called “Guru-Ma” which is also termed as “Ma,” “Malik,” “Murubbi,” “Malkin,” and “Mukh-hijre.” She is the guardian of all Hijras and the owner of all properties of the Gharana. Guru-ma is a senior Hijra by age and also intelligent and talented. She acts as household head. All Hijras are obedient to her. (source:

Transgender People In India



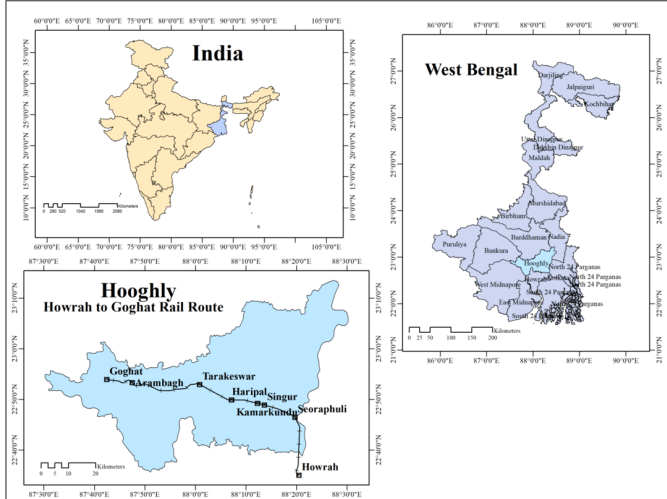
Source: Census 2011

According to 2011 census the total number of third gender population in India is 4,87,803. Of these 54,854 are children between the ages of 0-6 (Census 2011) and literacy rate is 56.07%. But an estimated 5-6 million eunuchs live in India. According to 2011 census Uttar Pradesh has the maximum number of third gender population with more than 11 lakh population (about 28% of total transgender in India) where as Gujarat has minimum number of third gender population. West Bengal has more than 30000 transgender. Proportion of those working is also low (38%) in the transgender community compared to general people (46%).

The Indian lawyer and author Rajesh Talwar has written a book

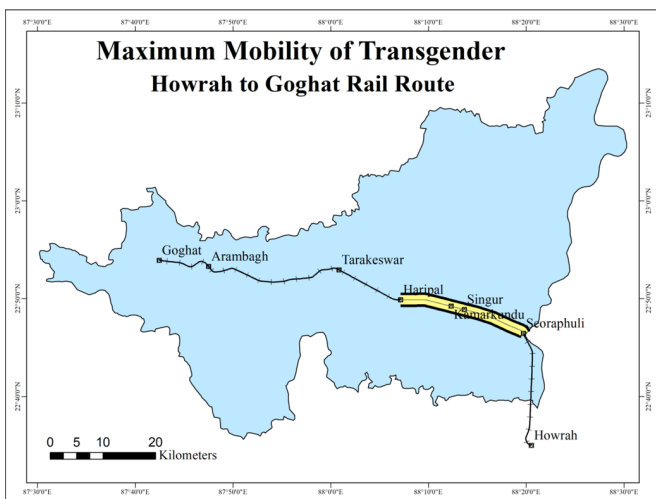
titled 'The Third Sex and Human Rights' which highlights the human rights abuses suffered by the community. Only few employment opportunities are available to them. Most of them earn their income by performing in the ceremonies (toil), begging (dheegna) or prostitution (raarha).

Location – Local Train Route Between Seoraphuli-Haripal



According to the census of 2011, the total number of transgender people in West Bengal is 30349. Of these 2376 are children between the ages of 0-6 and the total literacy rate of transgender people in West Bengal is 58.83% (According to the Census of 2011). About 1429 transgender voters are included in West Bengal.

In 2015 a Transgender Development Board was constituted in West Bengal by the department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare. But only 16% transgender persons have Aadhar card according to a reply by Ravi Sankar Prasad in Rajya Sabha in 2016.

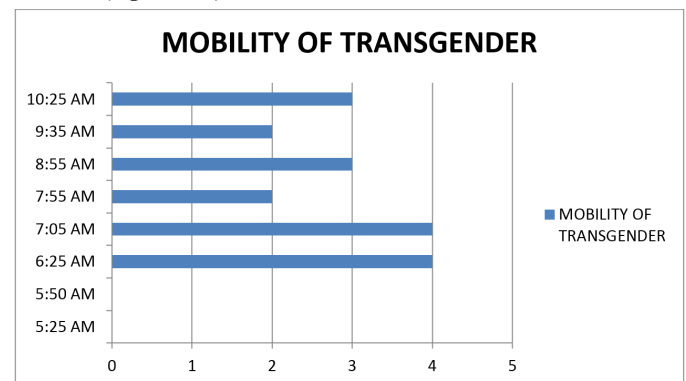


The study area here is the local train route between Seoraphuli to Tarakeswar. In West Bengal mainly districts of south Bengal - Murshidabad, Nadia, Howrah, Kolkata, Hooghly, 24 Parganas are known for their maximum inhabitation of Hijras. They make a living by dancing and celebrating in births and marriage ceremonies and also begging at the traffic signals and in trains and buses. In trains they also have division as express

train and local trains.

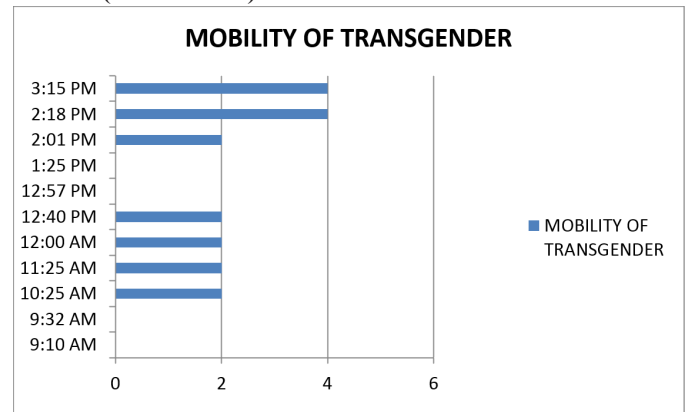
In this route, the Hijras have their maximum mobility mainly between Seoraphuli to Haripal. This is a route of local trains only. A group of 4-6 hijras every day board the train at Seoraphuli; most of them get down at Nalikul Station or Haripal station for earning through dancing and celebrating the new born. Others are engaged in begging in the train. They give blessing to the passengers as in India it is believed that a Hijras blessing brings a good luck to them. A sample survey of two groups of hijras (24 and 12 in each group) who commute daily through the route has done here as the their number is minimum in comparison to other hawkers in the train.

Commute of Hijras Between Sheoraphuli And Tarakeswar Station (Up Local)



Source: Field Survey

Commute of Hijras Between Tarakeswar And Sheoraphuli Station (Down Local)



Source: Field Survey

From the above chart the maximum mobility is found between 6 am to 7 am and after 10 am in the up trains, and in the down trains the maximum mobility is found between the trains of 2pm to 3:30pm. Here the mobility is not high but if we consider about the total number of hijras in a gharana, it is a considerable figure. They mainly come from their gharana at Srirampur and spread to different points for their earnings. In their Gharana 5 to 12 hijras can stay together under the supervision of a Guruma though, some of them also stay alone on a different rented house. They give almost all their earnings to their Guruma and keep a small amount for them. A small amount is also paid to them by Guruma as their pocket money to spend for their needs.

They work 6 days in a week and spend one day as holiday. On that day they do all their pending household work, visit cinemas, go for shopping, have lunch at a restaurant and also spend time with their boyfriend.

Problems Faced By Hijras/Transgender

During their daily journey by local train for their earning they face some problems.

Problems of Hijras in West Bengal	Problems Faced By Hijras During Train Journey
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absence Of Social Security 2. Educational Problems 3. Bad Habbits 4. Health Problems 5. Stigma And Discriminatives 6. Violence 7. Hijra Community Issues 8. Sexual Behaviour Problem 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Abuse Such As Taunting, Physical Harassment Leading To Psychological Trauma 2. Social Refusal 3. Harassment By Other Hawkers And Hawkers Association 4. Discrimination In Basic Human Needs (Access To Lavatory)

Hijras are socially neglected who lack social inclusion and social security. This leads to create many bad habit as well as behavioral problem among them. Social abuse like taunting, physical harassment, social refusal leads to psychological trauma among them. Due to social refusal they have difficulties accessing safe medical facilities also. They are deprived of proper education. Refusal and reluctance from almost all sphere of life make them to adopt bad habit and behavior. They use foul languages and often show violence among public.

FINDINGS

1. They have a close, segregated and separate community.
2. Every group of hijras has a 'Guruma' who is essentially leader of that group as in tribal leaders. All members of that particular group have to obey and follow the Guruma.
3. During my study I have observed that hijras operate in two distinct separate groups-
 - One group approaches the already marked houses of the new born in the locality or neighbourhood. Again the area of the members in which they operate is marked and followed by the members of that particular group.
 - Another type of group operate in trains - both local and express.
4. Within the hijra community the group that approaches the new born babies have a higher social status than the group that operate in trains.
5. During interaction with hijras I observed that the social status of hijras within their community is also dependent on their religion and faith. Hijras practicing Hinduism or Islam belong to higher status whereas those practising Christianity are considered socially inferior among them.

Limitation of The Study

1. The base of the study could have been wider but for reluctance of the hijras in interaction.
2. The hijras do not want to talk about themselves including their problems due to shame, social abuse and seclusion.
3. The hijras are unwilling to share information about them

probably arising out of hatred and apathy towards the society at large.

4. The income of the hijras could not be quantified as no credible information could be gathered of the same.

CONCLUSION

With the term Hijra the picture immediately come to our mind is someone with loud voice, cheap and loud make up, long hair, male appearance but female behavior. We never consider them as one of us. Even after inclusion by the Supreme Court and framing of laws, in reality the picture is different. The people in this part of the world are primarily engaged in Kinnar and Nachnewali (a dialect within the Hijra community where kinnar refers to the dance performance during weddings and birth of a baby and nachnewali refers to begging). For actual and real inclusion of the so called Hijras or eunuchs in the mainstream of the society, we the people and the society must be more understanding, sympathetic and accommodative towards them.

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